

## ALTERNATIVE A (EXISTING CONDITIONS)

### OVERALL CONCEPT

This alternative (the status quo or no-action alternative) would continue current management at Isle Royale National Park. It provides a baseline for evaluating the changes and related environmental effects of the other alternatives. Park managers would continue to provide for visitor use and would respond to natural and cultural resource management concerns according to current policy and legal requirements and as funding allowed. There would be no change in management direction.

### PARK MANAGEMENT

The Rock Harbor and Windigo areas would remain the focal points for visitor orientation and visitor services. The campgrounds, docks, and trails would remain (see Alternative A map). Portions of the backcountry would continue to be available for cross-country (off-trail) hiking and camping; other areas would remain closed to these uses for resource protection. No-wake zones would be continued. Designated wilderness areas (99% of the park's land) would be managed according to the Wilderness Act of 1964 and NPS policies. The park would remain largely unzoned otherwise, although more remote areas would be wilder and more primitive than those near developed areas and ferry stops. No limits would be placed on visitor use, so visitation could continue to increase.

Visitor orientation and interpretation programs would continue at the Houghton headquarters, at Rock Harbor, and at Windigo. Natural or cultural features of special interest such as scenic viewpoints, lighthouses, and mining sites would also be interpreted.

Cultural resources would be managed as funding allowed according to the park's *Resources Management Plan*. The park would continue to

protect and maintain known archeological sites and restore or adaptively use certain historic structures. An update of the List of Classified Structures and completion of a cultural landscape report would, in consultation with the Michigan historic preservation office, determine eligibility for listing on the national register (including for structures under life lease) as funding allowed. Such resources would then be maintained, stabilized, or documented and allowed to decay.

Park staff would encourage and support research efforts that would add to the available information about the park's history and prehistory. The park would consider potential partners interested in stabilizing shipwrecks. When the National Park Service receives title to the lighthouses owned by the U.S. Coast Guard (such as Passage Island Lighthouse), partners interested in preserving the structures would be considered. (Current funding levels would not permit the park to improve or even stabilize the lighthouses.)

Inventories for archeological sites would continue on a site-by-site basis following compliance procedures established by the September 1995 programmatic agreement among the National Park Service, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers.

Natural resources would be managed as time and funding allowed according to the *Resources Management Plan*. The natural resources inventory and monitoring program would be continued and expanded if possible. Park staff would encourage the research that is needed to fill key information gaps. Fisheries and water resources management plans would be developed.

NPS operations at Houghton, Rock Harbor, Windigo, and the Mott Island headquarters

would not change. Ranger stations at Amygdaloid Island and Malone Bay would remain. The park would continue to be closed from November 1 to April 15 for the benefit and protection of wildlife.

## CONCESSIONS SERVICES

Ferries would continue to serve Rock Harbor, Windigo, and secondary stops such as McCargoe Cove and Malone Bay. Water taxi service to intermediate stops would also continue as demand warranted. Concession services at Rock Harbor (motel and house-keeping units, restaurant and snack bar, marina, boat rentals, fuel sales, store) and Windigo (store, boat rentals, fuel sales) would remain.

It is not likely that any combination of overnight and food services at Rock Harbor could continue to be offered without a financial subsidy to provide utilities to the concessioner (see Appendix C). This conclusion was based on the *Concession Feasibility Analysis, Isle Royale National Park*, which was prepared for Rock Harbor. The study takes into consideration the high cost of utilities on the island and the relatively low number of visitors using the concession's overnight accommodations. Without subsidy, the cost of providing lodging and food services could drive up visitor costs to a level that few visitors would be willing or able to pay (which already appears to be happening). This could result in the elimination of overnight and food services at Rock Harbor.

The concessioner would have to be subsidized through a congressional appropriation to the

park. This subsidy would have to be adequate for capital costs related to backlogged utility and infrastructure upgrades and the annual operating cost of supplying utilities to the concessioner in excess of the cost of comparables (the difference between utility costs on the mainland and costs at the park). This subsidy is estimated at a minimum of \$2.1 million for the backlogged utility and infrastructure capital improvement needs and a minimum of \$400,000 per year, plus annual consumer price index increases, to keep the subsidy current. This subsidy would allow a reduction in the prices of rooms, meals, and all other goods and services and would make concessioner services more affordable. If this subsidy is not received, costs for the visitor will continue to escalate, which would result in prices not affordable to most park visitors.

## PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Priorities for programmatic actions have been identified in existing plans. Upgrading utility systems at Rock Harbor would be the highest priority.

Alternative A construction costs (actually costs for backlogged repair and rehabilitation needs) are estimated at \$7,247,760. Research, inventory, and monitoring costs (existing backlog) are estimated at \$1,440,000 in one-time costs plus \$199,000 annually. An additional annual appropriation of approximately \$400,000 would be needed to subsidize the concession operation at Rock Harbor. See Appendix B for details.